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A teacher reports on the understanding to be gained by visits to the homes of disadvantaged students. Because many parents cannot and do not come to scheduled conferences at school, the teacher visited the families, in this case to explain the availability of a summer school program. This teacher found that the parents of culturally disadvantaged children look to the school for personal guidance and leadership, and not only for the proper education of their children. Such home visits can help schools to plan experiences which meet the needs of the children. (NH)

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Home Visitations Open Doors. . .

A Teacher Visits the Homes of Disadvantaged Children

by Ann Williams

"I DON'T WANT my little boy to be ignorant like me."

These were the penetrating words of a mother whose child is culturally disadvantaged. These were the words of a mother who cares about her child and wants something better in life for him than she has had.

After making visits to the homes of culturally disadvantaged children, I was convinced that such parents are deeply interested in their children's future. But the lives of the parents are so complex. How do you plan for the future when you are swallowed up in just surviving? How do you think of getting ahead when your thoughts are necessarily limited to getting enough food for the next meal? Merely existing is a full-time task!

Would culturally disadvantaged parents send their children to school during the summer? After explaining that this was a special program to help their child, the parents agreed—were even pleased—for their children to attend.

There are scheduled parent conferences during the regular school year. However, the parents I visited were the ones that usually did not come for conferences. These culturally disadvantaged parents didn't come to school because they had small children at home. The parents were embarrassed by the clothes they had to wear. Often, the parents' own school experiences had been unpleasant. If schools are to be successful in helping disadvantaged children, maybe teachers should go to children's homes instead of asking parents to come to school.

The parents told how hard they try to do the best they can for their children. One mother said, "The only thing I could do for the kids last summer was take them swimming three times. I wanted to do more. There just isn't enough money to do nice things. I'll be glad they can come to summer school and have a good time."

Where do the parents of culturally disadvantaged children look for help and for the better things in life for their children? For many of these families, school is the most important social institution with which they have contact. They look to the school not only for education; they seek guidance and leadership for all phases of living. They are dependent people not wanting the school's pity, but they do want the school's help.

The parents of culturally disadvantaged children have confidence in school and in teachers. When I explained the summer program would help their child, they said, "If you think school will be good for my child, then I want him to go." Their confidence in me as a teacher and in the school stirred a sense of humility and responsibility within me.

The warmth with which I was received expressed their feelings. As I walked from the car to the house, the children shouted, "Hey, the teacher's here." Before I could even introduce myself, the mother opened the door and asked me in. I was invited for supper; I had popcorn balls; I was offered a kitten; I was given a shell. All were wonderful gestures on the part of these parents to show me that I was truly welcome.

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The children were delighted when their moth- said they could come to the special summer ogram. Immediately they began questioning, Vell, is it tomorrow?" or "Is it next week?" or low long is it?" Then, younger or older brothers d sisters would ask, "Can I go, too?" The chil- en wanted to come to school, and they were cited about it.

Young children want to learn and want to come school. How often culturally disadvantaged ldren come and meet failure! By the time these ildren are in fourth or fifth grade, they often mark, "I hate school." School work is made to something that they cannot achieve; their great ire to learn is destroyed; and they do not want come to school. The school has not provided for ir needs.

An important part of my home visit was lis- ing to the mothers. They wanted very much to k, not always about school, not always about ir children. I did not answer, "I know how it ls to be poor." I didn't know how it felt to ep on a raw mattress without bed linens. But the mother and I did have one thing in common—the welfare of her child.

When I left the house, a flock of children was usually waiting for me outside. They asked, "Are you coming to my house?" If I had to tell them "No," the disappointed look on their faces gave me a guilt complex. I was the Pied Piper walking back to my car with my followers holding my hand or hanging on to my dress. Driving home, I tried to think of the kinds of experiences the school needs to provide for these culturally disadvantaged children.

Each morning as they greeted me in the classroom with their smiles, I wanted to ask them, "How can I help you?" If only we were perceptive enough to understand what they tell us, we would know.[1]

[1]A special class was conducted in The Laboratory School to provide observation and participation experiences for teachers enrolled in the I.S.U. reading institute organized to help teachers teach disadvantaged children. Four centers were also developed in the city of Terre Haute for the I.S.U. reading institute for teachers of disadvantaged children, summer, 1965.

ideposts for Love and Understanding

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understandings are over, let us hope and trust they can become "bygones."

0) *Teachers and parents can help children to face the realities of life.*

Without burdening children, we can be honest about family problems, social problems, disappointments, death, etc. This can be done in terms of the age level and understanding of the child.

1) *Children can be helped to develop a wholesome sense of humor.*

The smile and the laugh are the vitamins of emotional health. Realistic optimism and humor can make many a problem lighter. Besides, adults can enjoy and share the spontaneous delights of children.

2) *Each child is unique in his own right and his intrinsic worth.*

It is best to avoid comparing children in the same class, the same or different families. Every child develops and grows at his own individual pace. Growth may not be even in all directions.

3) *All who work with children must recognize that all behavior is caused.*

There are reasons for everything that happens. However, those who help children must recognize they are human and possess frailties —and avoid expecting impossible perfection. Then, too, every adult who works or lives with children is not a trained psychologist or psychiatrist and cannot attempt to constantly analyze and interpret all behavior.

(14) *Children grow through certain basic developmental stages with unique variations for each one.*

Some walk at nine months and others walk at eighteen months; some sit at five months. Emotional growth finds its own rhythm too. If you cannot be immature at four, five, six, or seven, when can you?

(15) *Every stage of growth is important. All of life is important.*

Let us help children to feel that we love them as they are: boy or girl, baby or toddler or school age child, slim or heavy, light or dark. It is good to be what you are if others help you to feel valued that way and to see life in that manner. The challenge is ours.